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## COMEDY



### Joe's Convenience Reunion Tour

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There is a sketch in the Joe's Convenience repertoire about businessmen who have unlikely names like Please and Thank You. Naturally, the more they talk ("Sorry Anybody, meet Please Nothing...") the more the confusion piles up.

It's basically Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" — until it suddenly isn't. The sketch changes direction mid-step and instead zips to a tidy conclusion that still manages to bring the whole thing full circle.

It's little surprises like this that defined a lot of the work the Joes did in the 1990s. Even if it's by putting a new spin on an old bit, "the best thing you can hope for in comedy is to be fresh," says Simon Fraser, a point demonstrated, he adds, by some of his *Monty Python* bits and by the recent running joke case study that was *The Aristocrats*.

Fraser and partner Ben Brooks were briefly famous for their fresh take on sketch in the mid-'90s — when they were held up as this city's Next Big Thing in comedy, known as much for zigging against all zags as for ahead-of-their-time use of multimedia on stage. They were "the best thing going in Canada," according to comedy scribe Andrew Clark in *The Toronto Star*, and before long had a development deal with *Saturday Night Live*'s big daddy Lorne Michaels.

"The worst part was we started to believe it," says Fraser, in a penitent nod to his equally famous ego. "I look back on myself and say, 'You stupid little fuck, what were you thinking?'"

The deal died on the table and after a few more years of limping around, the Joes fizzled out. Brooks followed his wife to L.A. and a music career; Fraser went into web design.

"We came so close to getting everything we ever wanted and then it fell apart," says Fraser.

Losing the deal was "very frustrating," agrees Brooks over the phone from California; it was a big reason why he "stepped off the comedy train."

But earlier this year the Joes got back on that train and — after getting drunk out in the desert — have for the first time in almost a decade written new material and re-tinkered some old. The results go on stage this week with a series of dates at Yuk Yuk's, The Rivoli, Spirits Bar and Grill and Comedy Bar.

The Comedy Bar show is the new material, and the "first step of the second coming" for the duo. Not a last hurrah, says Fraser, but the start of something new.

"They say you can't go back again, but I guess we'll see," says Brooks.